

Message Text

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ACTION EB-11

INFO OCT-01 ARA-11 ADP-00 SS-15 M-03 A-01 L-03 IO-12 SY-10

CAB-09 CIAE-00 COME-00 DODE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00 RSC-01

FAA-00 SCA-01 USSS-00 PA-03 USIA-12 PRS-01 NEA-10

RSR-01 /115 W

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R 220049 Z MAY 73

FM AMEMBASSY MEXICO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6111

INFO AMEMBASSY CARACAS

C O N F I D E N T I A L MEXICO 3630

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ETRN , XM, MX

SUBJ: CIVAIR: HIJACKING OF AVENSA AIRCRAFT FROM VENEZUELA

REF: A. CARACAS 4314, B. STATE 83746

1. AS DESCRIBED IN REF A, FOUR ARMED MEN HIJACKED A CONVAIR 580 AIRCRAFT OF THE VENEZUELAN AIRLINE AVENSA, FLIGHT 523, WITH 32 PASSENGERS AND FIVE CREWMEN ABOARD AND DIRECTED IT TO PANAMA FOR REFUELLING. THEY ALLOWED THREE WOMEN AND TWO CHILDREN TO DISEMBARK THERE AND THEN PROCEEDED ON TO MERIDA, YUCATAN, MEXICO, WHERE THEY AGAIN REFUELED BEFORE HEADING TO MEXICO CITY, WHERE THEY ARRIVED AT 0845 ON THE MORNING OF MAY 19.

2. THE HIJACKERS THEN THREATENED TO BLOW UP THE PLANE AND ITS OCCUPANTS IF THEIR DEMAND, EXPRESSED AT THE TIME OF THE HIJACKING, THAT 79 POLITICAL PRISONERS IN VENEZUELA BE RELEASED, WERE NOT MET. THE GOV AT MIDMORNING CONVEYED ITS DECISION NOT RPT NOT TO NEGOTIATE WITH THE HIJACKERS TO THE GOM, WHICH THEREUPON INFORMED THE HIJACKERS, WHO DECIDED TO ACCEPT A GOM OFFER OF FOOD AND FUEL FOR A FLIGHT TO CUBA. THE SUBDIRECTOR OF THE FEDERAL SECURITY POLICE OF MEXICO, CONFIDENTIAL

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MIGUEL NAZAR HARO, VOLUNTARILY ACCOMPANIED THE HIJACKERS TO CUBA. AFTER YET ANOTHER REFUELING STOP IN MERIDA, THE PLANE ARRIVED IN CUBA LATE IN THE AFTERNOON OF MAY 19, WHEREUPON THE HIJACKERS SURRENDERED THEMSELVES TO CUBAN AUTHORITIES. THE REMAINING PASSENGERS AND CREW RETURNED TO VENEZUELA ON THE AFTERNOON OF MAY 20.

3. MEDIA SOURCES INDICATE THAT THE HIJACKING WAS ENTIRELY THE WORK OF PUNTO CERO, A LOCAL VENEZUELAN LEFTIST GROUP TRAINED IN CUBA. ONE HIJACKER HAS BEEN IDENTIFIED AS FEDERICO BOTTINI MARIN, PUNTO CERO'S LEADER, WHO HAD THREATENED TO KILL ANY AMERICAN CITIZENS ABOARD THE HIJACKED PLANE (REF B). FORTUNATELY, THERE WERE NONE ABOARD.

4. ACCORDING GOM OFFICIAL, HIJACKERS WERE FOUR: TWO WHITE MEN, ONE BLACK MAN PLUS BLACK'S GIRLFRIEND. THE BLACK MAN WAS VERY NERVOUS AND IT WAS HE WHO KEPT TALKING ABOUT BLOWING UP THE PLANE. THE GOM OFFICIAL AND OTHER HIJACKERS EVENTUALLY TALKED HIM OUT OF THIS IDEA.

5. COMMENT: MEXICAN GOVERNMENT FOUND ITSELF IN DIFFICULT POSITION IN RESPONDING TO HIJACKERS' DEMANDS BECAUSE VENEZUELAN GOVERNMENT'S HARD- LINE STAND WAS DIRECTLY OPPOSED TO GOM POLICY OF ACCEDING TO DEMANDS OF HIJACKERS AND KIDNAPPERS IN ORDER TO SAVE LIVES OF INNOCENTS. ITS DECISION TO PLACE SENIOR OFFICIAL ABOARD PLANE WAS SUCCESSFUL ATTEMPT TO PERSUADE HIJACKERS NOT TO BLOW UP PLANE IN RETURN FOR ASSURANCES OF SAFE CONDUCT TO CUBA. HIJACKERS WERE EVIDENTLY AFRAID VENEZUELAN AIR FORCE MIGHT ATTEMPT TO INTERCEPT PLANE AND THEY ACCEPTED GOM OFFICIAL'S PRESENCE AS GUARANTEE OF SAFE CONDUCT.

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